

## **A Profile on Disability Services On Campus**

Disabled students on Mississippi State University campus grounds need accommodation year round, and trained professionals help the university provide what students need.

Of course, student input is very important to consider when assessing the usefulness of accommodations. Uniqua Atkinson is a graduate student at MSU who has Spinal Muscular Atrophy, a neuron disease that leads to loss of motor function and muscle atrophy from understimulation.

Atkinson talked about her overall painless and positive experience with accommodations on campus, though she does have a couple issues.

“My main issue is opening doors and being out in the rain, I can’t hold the door by myself,” when speaking on weather issues. She then went on to express the fact that she was trapped in her own dorm because she could “never get off the first floor because they didn't have elevators.”

The graduate student expressed a desire to improve a couple things on campus besides protection from the weather. One thing she briefly touched on was the possibility of a self-defense class tailored to the disabled.

She lamented the general lack of social opportunities for disabled people when compared to the general population, using the inaccessibility of the gym as an example. Many people meet each other and socialize in the shared experience of going to the gym, which was not designed with the severely disabled in mind and excludes them from that element of society on campus.

Last on her wish list for potential improvements, Atkinson also spoke about a desire for more virtual classes, since disabilities often mean that life is volatile and sometimes students have issue managing to get to class due to physical or weather-related conditions.

Even with these few grievances, she likes the service she's received. She recounted her previous pleasant experience with Micah White and a woman named Marla who were with the DRC and helped her with her disability struggles. She appreciates the accommodations in place and wants MSU to strive for better.

“On a scale from one-to-ten, one being not so good and ten being absolutely wonderful, I'd rate [campus disability services] a 7.”

Chris Dallager is the Director of the Disability Resource Center, an organization also on the MSU campus whose self-described mission is to promote full access for disabled students and a campus committed to inclusion and access as a core principle.

Dallager spoke about the importance of physical disability accommodations for

all students. He talked about how, while most measures are specifically for disabled students, non-disabled students can also make use of accessibility measures.

“For people without disabilities, if you've got your arms full, it's awfully nice to be able to hit your elbow against the button, or you hit your foot against a lower door opener and open the door, so they work great for everybody,” Dallager said.

Dallager also spoke about a couple other things, including a website where students can report physical and technological barriers to access. He also mentioned universal design in education courses.

Universal design in education courses teach educators about how to design their courses to accommodate most learning styles and disabilities using universally accessible learning materials that are comprehensible regardless of a student's sensory and physical abilities. However, Dallager laments that these courses are not compulsory.

I think, if [required training], if we could get more people into that, then I think we'd have a better situation for some of the other issues that come up,” Dallager said.

Stacy Jackson is a Project Coordinator for the T.K. Martin Center for Technology and Disability, an organization on MSU grounds with a commitment to serving Mississippians of all ages in receiving disability care,

including assistive technology and psychological services.

Jackson describes the T.K. Martin Center as "more on the diagnostics" side of disability accommodation services. It provides its clients with a complex psychological assessment in order to provide diagnoses that give clients proof of their needs so they can seek accommodation, as well as re-evaluations and behavioral therapy when needed.

It also has a large focus on assistive technology, including but not limited to, vehicle modification, adaptive driving, accommodations for the hearing, visual, and learning impaired, and home accommodations.

The T.K. Martin Center serves all ages, though it does have a psychologist working under a grant that focuses on clients aged 14 to 25 and special education for very young children through Project IMPACT.

As for MSU Students, the young project coordinator described the response to the center's service as positive.

"I can speak towards the Mississippi State students that do seek services here at T.K. Martin Center. I can speak to that, you know, the interactions that I've had with them and the feedback that we've had from them has been great," Jackson said.